

[Government Cuts & Politics of Social Reform](#)

[Time Hangs Heavy for the Idle Rich](#)

[Keir Hardie & the ILP](#)

[The Consumer Unmasked](#)

[Is Barak Obama a Marxist?](#)

[Obstacles to Socialist Understanding](#)

[The Failure of Economic Models](#)

[Who Will Do Unpleasant Work In Socialism?](#)

[The Right to Strike](#)

[The Wages System versus Human Need](#)

[Tomorrow's Surplus Value](#)

[What Is the Socialist Party of Great Britain?](#)

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Government Cuts & the Politics of Social Reform

Government cuts are not new

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition announced at its formation in May 2010 severe cuts to government spending and capital projects. The June budget saw further cuts proposed which will mean a pay freeze for two years for State employed workers, particularly those in Local Government. There will also be many thousands of redundancies with employment likely to go beyond three million.

Government cuts are not new. Previous governments, Labour and Tory, both made cuts to government spending. The Wilson government severely reduced government spending between 1968 and 1969 and among the cuts was the re-imposition of prescription charges. In the 1970's under the IMF austerity plan the Callaghan government cut spending to the NHS. The Thatcher government also made cuts to government expenditure during the 1980's.

And with the government cuts, so too, has been the predictable response by trade unions and the capitalist left.

In a report "*All Pain, No Gain: The Case Against Cuts*," the TUC, which represents 58 trade unions and 6.5 million workers, warned job losses resulting from the cuts would lead to a fall in government tax receipts and a rise in benefit payments. It also said that the cuts are likely to deepen the deficit.

The Report said:

"The government's plans will cause enormous hardship to millions of people and set the economy back years while failing to achieve the very thing all this pain is supposed to achieve - reducing the deficit," (REUTERS 21 June 2010).

What of the capitalist left? The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has put forward its own proposals to reduce government debt. This is what they said:

The main parties claim we need to cut £167 billion to solve the deficit. Here Socialist Worker shows how we can raise almost twice that—without cutting any public services. (The Great Election Cuts Lie (SOCIALIST WORKER April 10th 2010).

And the SWP's solution to the deficit was for any future government to cut tax avoidance, stop tax evasion and to ensure all other forms of tax is collected. Although the SWP make an elementary mathematical mistake in confusing the deficit with government debt what they and the TUC are ignore is that the budget, the spending plans of individual government departments, the problems associated with the capitalist State, both national and local, are of no concern or interest to the working class.

The Socialist case against Reformism and Political Opportunism

The case of the SPGB against getting involved in the day to day problems of the capitalist class and their politicians is that workers have their own immediate interest in replacing capitalism with Socialism. Yes, workers have to protect pay and working conditions but they always find themselves on an uneven playing field principally because they do not own the means of production. The ability of workers to resist the encroachment of capital is also restricted by adverse economic conditions like a trade depression and high levels of unemployment.

What separates the Labour Party, the TUC, the unions and the SWP on the one hand and the SPGB on the other is around the question of social reform and the so-called "*welfare State*". The Labour Party and the Trade Unions believe that you can operate, through taxation and government spending, a system of redistributive social wealth and social security on the basis of the profit system. You cannot. If workers want to provide decent health and housing this can only be achieved within the Socialist framework of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production by all of society.

The SWP, and other political parties like them, believe that any grievance pursued by non Socialist workers can lead to mass demonstrations, strikes, violent insurrection, barricades, "*workers councils*" and the imposition over society of a dictatorship by the SWP leadership (when they are not fighting amongst themselves). It is pure fantasy. Whereas the SWP do not want to build up a Socialist majority the SPGB sees no alternative to this hard but important work. The political response to the problems facing workers has to be social revolution instead of social reform; persuading workers to join a principled Socialist party rather than parasitically feeding off the grievances and anger of non-socialists.

The reality of social reforms

Social reforms have to be paid for and the burden for paying for them falls on the capitalist class. Since the middle of the 19th century many social reform measures have been introduced, some of which have benefited both capitalism and the workers. Others social reforms have come and gone. Others have been watered down or have had negative outcomes not foreseen by the reformers.

In addition to supporting social reform measures put forward by anti-Socialist parties, the working class find themselves drawn into other types of political activity such as opposing the privatisation of nationalised industries. Nationalisation and privatisation are not socialist and capitalist options. Nationalisation is not Socialism but a form of capitalism.

The reformers call of "*ignore Socialism we must do something now*" whether it is protests against government or the cutting back of Labour's school improvement programme ignores the fact that, in spite of Trade Union action and the political opportunism of the capitalist Left, the workers exploitation remains along with social problems like poverty, unemployment and exploitation.

Workers should understand that capitalism can never be run to meet the interest of all society; that is, in the interest of the working class majority. Workers just do not have a stake in capitalism. Social Reformism involves the working class in political action which is detrimental to the establishment of Socialism and the conscious and political action of a socialist majority to achieve common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society.

Capitalism can never be a society "*at ease with itself*", as John Major once said. Capitalism, like a shark, can never

be at rest. There are no safe social reform havens which afford permanent shelter from the effects of capitalism. 1.5 million children are still below the government's own definition of poverty; 2.5 million workers are officially unemployed and many of the elderly live lonely and degrading lives until they die. The whole history of working class support for social reforms has meant the retention of capitalism and the furtherance of the interest of the capitalist class.

A Lesson from history

In the 19th century, in an early stage in the development of capitalism, the ruling class was dominated by the landed aristocracy, who held political power. Owning the land, they were the main food producers. To protect their monopoly and keep up prices they forbade the import of foreign corn. As a result workers had to pay high prices for bread. Consequently, those workers who were employed in industry were compelled to press for higher wages, which the industrialist had to pay if he wanted to keep an effective labour force, but the increase went into the pocket of the landlord and the landed aristocracy.

The immediate reaction of the industrialists was to form the anti-Corn Law League in 1839 under the control of Cobden and Bright, the Liberal party leaders. In the four years up to 1843 the league distributed over 10 million copies of pamphlets and newspapers calling on workers to protest against the high price of corn, which they claimed was responsible for working class poverty. Every working class organisation was saturated at the time with the propaganda of the Anti-Corn Law League. The workers duly responded, and after much agitation Peel repealed the Corn Laws in 1846. Foreign corn was allowed in, the landlord's monopoly was broken and the price of bread fell. But wages also fell, and the worker was no better off. The industrialist had won his battle against the landlord.

Over a century and a half later nothing has changed. Workers are still not pursuing their own class interests. They follow the capitalist Left who promise them that strikes and mass demonstrations will stop the cuts instead of understanding capitalism and organising for Socialism. The capitalist Left cannot stop capitalism being run in the interest of employers.

The politics of mass demonstrations, general strikes and riots against government cuts are in any event a fruitless exercise as the Greece and Spanish workers have learnt to their cost. The cuts took place in these countries despite efforts to stop them as they did in the Irish Republic and Iceland. The same severity of cuts will take place in Britain even if the Coalition unravels or some concessions are made. The government departments have to operate within a budget set by Parliament. If the budget reduces the money going to government departments or forces Ministers to reduce their spending this will ultimately lead to job cuts and a great deal of social pain for the workers involved.

And of course with government cutbacks history is just repeating itself. In 1931, for example, in an effort to balance the budget and restore confidence in the Pound the new national coalition government (with Philip Snowden, a member of the Labour Party, as Chancellor of the Exchequer) issued an emergency budget which led to severe cuts in public spending and wages.

Public sector wages and unemployment pay were cut by 10 per cent, teachers' pay by 15 per cent while unemployment benefit was reduced by 10 per cent and was only payable for 26 weeks. However, workers then as now learnt nothing from their experience of capitalism and the social problems created by capitalism and continued to vote into political power capitalist politicians.

Ill-informed understanding of the function of Government

Most workers still cling to the erroneous belief that the choice of introducing social reforms or dealing with major social problems facing workers is a matter for the government of the day. This is not the case. Governments of all varieties represent the interests of the employers. Social reforms have to be paid for out of taxation and the burden of taxation rests on the capitalist class.

Taxes are mainly paid out of income, and the income of the capitalist employer or shareholder is derived from the

surplus value created by the worker. The rate of taxation can never exceed the level of profit, any more than the part can be bigger than the whole.

Social reforms are not within the gift of the government, even a Labour government, who, before the April 2010 election pandered to interest groups around the country with a package of social reform measures and spending pledges which they could never have afforded had they been re-elected. These pre-election proposals and expenditure were immediately withdrawn by the Coalition government as a foretaste of the cuts to come.

True, there is some room for manoeuvre for governments, but it is capitalism which has developed the powers of government, not the politicians. If the government's basic function is to secure the capitalist in his privileged position it cannot contradict the basis of its own existence. Governments cannot ignore the economics of capitalism and the capitalist's right to profit.

Experience has shown that to the extent that the capitalist introduces reforms which "*benefit*" workers, so they are taken into consideration when wages and salaries are negotiated. Subsidized rents and food, free medical treatment, children's allowances, and any other "*benefits*" are taken into account by both trade unions and employers when dealing with wage claims.

The final position is stated in the basic Marxian economic law that the worker, generally speaking, only receives sufficient wages to sustain themselves and their family at any given time in their particular job, from week to week or from month to month. Capitalism is not a charity and does not exist to serve the interest of workers. Workers exist in capitalism to be exploited and to make profits for the capitalist class. Trade unions should recognise this fact.

Trade unions have no business advising governments how to run capitalism either now or in the future. They should also recognise that the state of the economy is also outside the sphere of government control. The trade cycle with its periodic crises, trade depression and high levels of unemployment is a fact of life of commodity production and exchange for profit.

Trade unions are always defensive organisations. But they at least could free themselves from the support they give to the Labour Party and other capitalist organisations and educate their members on the reality of capitalism through pointing them towards the writings of Marx.

And the idea that prevails amongst the infantile "*militant left*" like the SWP (whose job description now includes tax advice to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Taxes) is that agitation against the cuts will provide workers with sufficient experience to go on and demand Socialism, is absurd. This political nonsense has not stood up to historical examination. It simply has not worked, despite the ceaseless reformist and trade-union action carried on over the past 164 years or so. The capitalists are in control over the working class so long as reformist ideas form the mainstream of political thinking.

Under capitalism there can be no culture of contentment

The only way to counter the propaganda of the reformer is to show that it hasn't even achieved the limited objectives of making capitalism tolerable for the working class majority, let alone advance Socialism. The late economist, John Galbraith, just before he died, believed that capitalism had achieved contentment for a sizable majority of workers (THE CULTURE OF CONTENTMENT 1992). Two trade depressions later with millions of workers made redundant and social problems still afflicting the working class it was wishful thinking by an economist who thought Keynes was the answer. The deeply engrained social problems facing the working class on a daily basis cannot be reformed away anymore than governments can spend them away. Only the establishment of Socialism will create conditions of social harmony and comfort.

The difference between Socialism and capitalism is that the social requirements of a Socialist society would be dealt with and carried out as soon as the community became aware of any social need. Information in socialism would be transparent not opaque; open rather than closed for commercial reasons; factual rather than passed through the distortion of advertising. Commodity production under capitalism can never be rational or efficient; it is

contradictory, anarchic and anti-social.

In the 1942 QUESTIONS OF THE DAY the SPGB gave this advice to trade unions:

“The Socialist Party of Great Britain, while recommending Trade unionists to offer their utmost resistance to the worsening of their conditions, never fails to point out that under Capitalism the pressure upon the workers is inevitable. It is insufficient, therefore, merely to apply the brakes to these worsening conditions. The system that gives rise to them must be abolished (Ch IV Trade Unions p.25)

Trade unions are very limited in what they can and cannot do under capitalism. Socialists do not lecture capitalism or its politicians on how to administer the profit system or to deal with the hundreds of day to day problems capitalism faces. The Socialist answer to the perennial cuts in government spending over the last century and this one is the establishment of Socialism.

[Back to top](#)

Time Hangs Heavy for the Idle Rich

In 1831, Lord Goderich, the British Colonial Secretary said:

“without a class of persons willing to work for wages, how are the comfort and refinements of civilised life to be procured?” (Quoted by E.P. Thompson; CUSTOMS IN COMMONS 1991, p. 167).

And since Lord Goderich’s question was first posed in the early 19th century the ruling class have continued to monopolise the comforts and refinements of civilised life.

Today the rich have chauffeurs to drive them here and there, butlers to open doors and takes their coats and hats, maids to make their beds, nannies to look after their children, chefs to cook, solicitors to look after their property affairs, accountants, public relation advisors, investment consultants and of course politicians. They can buy everything; from high class courtesans to the finest wines and recreational drugs.

What of the capitalist class and work? The poet and playwright, John Gay (author of the BEGGARS OPERA), once wrote a fable about the way in which the idle rich find that *“time hangs heavy”* (*Fable XIII, Plutus, Cupid and Time* quoted in C. Hill, LIBERTY AGAINST THE LAW: *Some 17th Century Controversies* Penguin 1996).

And for an example of modern decadence and nihilism step forward Mr and Mrs Rausling a pair of socialites whose fortune is reported to be worth £4 billion and who were both recently arrested and sent to trial for consuming large amounts of cocaine. Describing the Rausling’s lifestyle the DAILY TELEGRAPH wrote:

“This a world of nights at the opera, country house weekends, yacht parties and extravagant holidays in faraway places. Yet it is also, at least in Hans Kristian's case, a world of emptiness and absence of purpose.”

The report went on to say:

For all the kind words spoken in his defense last week - "a decent man", "generous", "trying his best" - it was hard to establish what he actually does with his time” (13.04.2010).

If time hangs heavy for the idle rich it does not do so for the working class. The Rauslings’ £4 billion fortune comes from the surplus labour-time spent by workers in the productive process. Instead of supporting an idle class of parasites workers should consciously and politically struggle to establish a society of social fullness and purpose

[Back to top](#)

Keir Hardie & the ILP: From Expediency to Expiration

Some letters in the newspapers are often illuminating in their brevity. Others are just crass and stupid. An example of the latter was a letter published in THE INDEPENDENT by a Ralph Musgrove. Writing regarding the promotion of Islamicism in the UK he wrote:

“A significant section of Britain’s political left is determined to appear radical and revolutionary, even though the left has achieved most of what Kier Hardie set out to achieve” (1.07.2010).

It is doubtful if many of the readers of THE INDEPENDENT knew who Kier Hardie was. But a brief acquaintance with Hardie and his politics would have shown Mr Musgrove’s claims to be baseless. Hardie’s politics were an abject failure. His only success was in sowing confusion about how Socialism was to be established.

James Keir Hardie, one of the earlier Labour MPs was, at different times, Chairman of the Labour Party Annual Conference and Chairman and leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party. He was largely responsible for the formation of the Labour party and it has been claimed from him that *“More than any other man, he shaped the political history of the Labour Movement”*.

Members of the Labour Party praise him for making their party what it is today but, for a reason which will become obvious, they never quote his detailed statement about the kind of party he claimed to be creating. It was published in 1910 by the Independent Labour party under the title MY CONFESSION OF FAITH IN THE LABOUR ALLIANCE.

Keir Hardie had founded the Independent Labour Party in 1893 and was its chairman. His purpose in issuing his CONFESSION OF FAITH was to rebut the charge that, by affiliating to the Labour party, the ILP had sacrificed its *“Socialist”* character. Some of those who made the charge were members of the ILP.

Hardie defended affiliation to the labour party, which was, then as now, dominated by trade unions, on the ground of its practical advantage to the ILP but also, and primarily, on the ground of *“socialist”* principle –in line with his own declaration three years earlier that for him, the socialist objective was:

“...free Communism in which...the rule of life will be – “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” “. (Keir Hardie, FROM SERFDOM TO SOCIALISM 1907 page 89).

His argument from expediency was to point out to the ILP that if they wanted to grow quickly and, in particular, if they wanted to get members elected to Parliament, their only hope was to have the support and the votes of trade unionists and to fight elections as Labour party candidates.

Hardie indicated that there were some people: *“...who act as though their principal reason for being in the ILP is that they may get returned to Parliament”*. He did not pretend that the votes the ILP thus picked up were the votes for Socialists.

He quoted figures to show that while it had taken the ILP seven years as an independent organization to reach 193 branches and an income of £721, within nine years of affiliation to the Labour Party (1900-1909) these figures had jumped to 887 branches and an annual income of £8, 871.

But his main argument was that forming Marxian Socialist organizations and propagating Socialism failed to bring quick growth and was wrong in principle. He instanced the small growth of the social Democratic Federation and its failure to win any parliamentary elections, (He did not name the Socialist Party of Great Britain but had a reference to *“other socialist or pseudo-Socialist”* organizations).

He argued that Marxian Socialist propaganda did not quickly attract large numbers of workers and it was appreciation of this which had been the formation of the ILP, based on a different policy of:

“...conducting the propaganda in such a way as would win over working-class organizations, especially the Trade unions to the support of Socialism, rather than alienate them.

This policy, known as “*getting into the workers’ day-to-day struggles*”, was advocated by the ILP and later by the Communist Party and always featured in controversy between the SPGB and those two organizations.

History has dealt mockingly with Keir Hardie’s theories. In appearance everything happened just as he said it would; in essentials nothing. The tactics he urged on the ILP got them members, money and seats in the House of Commons. In the 1929 Parliament more than 200 MPs belonged to the ILP but by 1975 it had dissolved, though its opportunistic tactics are constantly revived by the capitalist Left. And the Labour Party first outstripped the Liberals, then became the largest party in Parliament and formed the government, all as Keir Hardie predicted.

But what has happened to his belief that the policy he stood for would convert the working-class to Marxian Socialism? For that was the specific claim he spelled out in his Confession:

“The Labour Party is the only expression of orthodox Marxian socialism in Great Britain. The Labour Party practices the Marxian policy of the class struggle, following Marx’s own example, and is blamed by its critics for doing so... Thus it is proved that the founders of the ILP, and even more so, of the Labour Party, were, if I may use the expression, in the direct line of apostolic succession from Marx and the other great master minds of Socialist theory and policy”

Where is it all now? Keir Hardie himself later repudiated the class struggle. The ILP and Labour Party dissociated themselves from Marxism. It was a General Secretary of the Labour Party, Mr Morgan Phillips, who asserted that his Party “...owed more to Methodism than to Marx”.

The Labour Party, TUC and the Unions all turned their backs on Marxian economics and gave whole-hearted support to anti-Marxist Keynesian myths of “*controlled capitalism*”, full employment and the end of economic crises. Even Keir Hardie’s belief that he was building a Party completely apart and hostile to the Tories and Liberals proved to be wrong because twice they have been they have been in a three-party coalition and once in a national coalition with the Tories and then with the Liberals under James Callaghan. They were prepared to do a deal with the Liberal Democrats after the last general election before the discussions soured. Above all, nobody in the Labour Party leadership today even pretends that the Party is interested in the Marxian socialist objective that Keir Hardie proclaimed.

The Labour Party has had 32 years in office, years of administering capitalism just like any other capitalist party. Winning the workers over to Socialism was bound to be a slow business. It was made more difficult by Keir Hardie’s policies. Events have shown how right the SPGB was and how wrong was Keir Hardie.

THE FAILURE OF CAPITALISM & WORLD UNEMPLOYMENT

World unemployment hit a record high in 2009 and is likely to remain at an elevated level through 2010. The number of jobless worldwide reached nearly 212 million in 2009 following an unprecedented increase of 34 million compared to 2007, on the eve of the global crisis, the International Labour Organisation said in its annual GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT TRENDS report (27 Jan 2010). The jobless rate rose to 6.6% in 2009, up 0.9 percentage points from 2007; a deliberate underuse of the forces of production. This demonstrates, yet again, the failure of capitalism to meet the need of all society and the urgent necessity for the world working class to establish Socialism.

[Back to top](#)

The Consumer Unmasked

The Act of Consuming

In the Venetian Carnival the wearer's identity and status is hidden from view. No one knows whether the person behind the mask is rich or poor, male or female, young or old. Likewise with the actors who walk the stage of capitalist economics. They wear an abstract mask hiding who they are, whether they are capitalists or workers; exploiters or exploited.

Capitalist economics is a fiction; a deliberate fiction to hide capitalist relations of production. Marx dismissed the economics after Smith and Ricardo as: “...*a fiction without fantasy, a religion of the vulgar*” (THEORIES OF SURPLUS VALUE PART THREE *Revenue and its Sources: Vulgar Political Economy* p. 453).

In capitalist economics there are no visible classes, class interests, class conflict and class struggle. The exploitive capitalist/worker relationship is hidden from view; instead there are only individuals living in economic harmony under the benevolent invisible hand of market forces. And no more so than with the central character of economic textbooks, the fictional “*sovereign consumer*”.

Consumer sovereignty is the belief that all economic activity under capitalism is directed towards consumption. The consumer, we are told by economists, has an insatiable appetite for commodity goods and services – witness the long queues for Apple's new iPad. Academic economics position the consumer right at the heart of their economics allowing economists to conveniently define their subject matter as the study of individuals trying to maximise their infinite desires against scarce resources.

Economics ignores the real world of capitalists and workers, of private ownership of the means of production, class exploitation and the deliberate underproduction. Capitalism's objective is to make profit and to accumulate capital. Capitalism does not exist to meet human need. Consumers under capitalism are those who can pay.

Capitalism deliberately under-produces, producing solely for the market irrespective of whether there are an urgent need for food, clothes, housing and medical treatment. The contradictions and anti social basis of capitalism is seen during periodic trade depressions when workers are made unemployed, goods are stocked up or destroyed and machinery underused or mothballed even though there is unmet social need.

So what is the consumer's real identity? Who or what lies behind the mask of this fictional world; this “*religion of the vulgar*”? In the real world, the world outside economic textbooks, the act of consuming commodities takes many different forms. Workers and their families consume subsistence commodities related to the wages system. And capitalists consume both luxury commodities out of their unearned income and, what Marx called, constant and variable capital. This needs some explanation.

Subsistence Consumption.

First, there is the range of commodities the worker has to buy and consume in order to live. Workers have to sell their ability to work to an employer because they do not own the means of production, the raw resources, factories, transport system and distribution points. They sell their labour power, the use of their capacity to work as a commodity in exchange for a wage or salary.

The value of labour power is determined like any other commodity by the socially necessary labour that goes into producing it. The value of the wage reflects the commodities necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of the worker and his family. For educated workers it also includes the costs of their training. Labour power also has historical and environmental factors, what Marx called a “moral” element, which varies from one country to another.

And in the process of commodity production workers are exploited. Suppose a worker sells his mental and physical

ability to a capitalist for an eight hour day. If a worker produces in four hours of work –what Marx called necessary labour time -the amount of value required to replace his wages he is not free to stop work and go fishing or read a book. The worker’s contract is for eight hours. The further four hours work is surplus time and produces a surplus value for the capitalist. In capitalism the concrete labour of the working class is abstracted and congealed in the commodity to be realised for a profit when sold on the market.

Consumption of Luxury Commodities

Workers do not consume luxury goods but capitalists do enjoy such consumption. The capitalist class enjoy a world of luxury commodities denied to the working class; mansions, expensive food, fine art, the list is endless. One example is the consumption of luxury yachts.

The 394-foot yacht owned by the Russian billionaire, Andrey Melnichenko's was completed in the mid-2008 for more than \$300 million and has custom parts and finishes including bath knobs costing \$40,000 apiece. Numerous companies involved in the yacht’s construction went bankrupt and the workers who lovingly crafted the components of the yacht were made unemployed; luxury consumption comes with a price.

Ironically, the only workers who will ever get near the yacht are the crew or the maintenance and repair engineers. And of course there will be the privileged visitors like Lord Mandelson and George Osborne both of whom have no trouble sponging off the hospitality of the “*filthy rich*”.

To help the rich enjoy luxury commodity consumption –helicopters, mansions, jewelry, paintings, smart wine and good food-there is the helpful “*How to spend it*” published each Friday by the FINANCIAL TIMES (11.06.10). In June readers were introduced to Matteo di Montezemolo Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Charme group which owns, among other things the private equity fund Montezemolo & Partners. Mr Montezemolo is given a page in the magazine to list all the luxury commodities he consumes. He says of two of his acts of consumption:

In my fridge you’ll always find the most exquisite mozzarella di bufala from Ciro a Mergellina in Naples. The owner sends it to my house in Rome, and sometimes it is still warm from the journey when we have it on Friday evenings.

And

“An indulgence I’d never forego is dinner once a year, at Caviar Kaspia in Paris. I eat caviar, of course, and salmon, French cheeses and wine. I have French friends who go much more often, but I wouldn’t, as that would make it ordinary”

Mr Montezemolo (and his rich Parisian friends) will not be affected by the new age of austerity and social pain. Only, that is, if he can’t get his hands on exclusive Buffalo milk from Naples and Sturgeon fish eggs sourced from the Caspian Sea for the Parisian restaurants favoured by the idle rich.

Commodity Fetishism

There is a painting by Rudolf Schlichter entitled “*A meeting of Fetishists*” (1921). The Fetishists meet to celebrate their fixation for objects of desire like shoes and stockings although one of the fetishists is seen praying, another wears a uniform of an army officer with a bolt through his head and another is dressed as a priest –as a result Schlichter’s art was included in Hitler’s Degenerate Art Exhibition and he was forbidden to paint. Nationalism and religion as fetishism did not go down very well in the Third Reich.

The sexual fetishism indulged in by the characters in Schlichter’s painting is not the same form of desire pursued by those queuing up to buy Apple’s iPad or the capitalist’s passion for the latest design in yachts or his indulgence for good cheese and caviar. Marx gave an altogether different meaning to idea of fetishism applying it first to the commodity and then extending it to include capital and interest-bearing capital in particular where all social relationships are obliterated and money appears to breed money as if by magic.

Of the fetishism of interest-bearing capital think of the magician, Paul Daniels with his assistant Debbie, performing their conjuring act in the City of London. The assistant holds out two bowler hats. Mr Daniels puts a £10 note in the first bowler hat labelled **M** says the magic word “*sell, sell, sell*” and pulls a £50 note from the other bowler hat labelled **M1**; £40 from nowhere. “*Now that’s magic*”.

In the first volume of CAPITAL Marx begins a lengthy and somewhat dry account of the commodity with sections on the two-fold nature of labour embedded in commodities and the forms of value, principally the money form. Then suddenly, in section 4 there is a remarkable heading “*The fetishism of the commodity and its Secret*”, nothing like it had ever been written. It is a racy and exciting section; Marx draws attention to the commodity’s “*metaphysical subtleties*” and “*theological niceties*”. Standing in relation to other commodities the commodity possesses “*grotesque ideas*” far more wonderful than “*if it were to begin dancing of its own free will*” (CAPITAL VOL. 1 *Commodities* ch. 1 p164). The mysterious quality of the commodity arose not from its use-value but from its exchange value.

When workers queue up to buy the latest Apple iPad –and the “*comedian*” and supporter of the free market, Stephen Fry collects them like a fetish hoards female shoes – he had 5 iPads at the last count – they look at the price of the commodity in question rather than the labour embodied in it. Buyers are totally unaware that exchange value conceals the commodities social origins. Decoding the commodity reveals social labour subordinate to capital; disempowered through the process of commodity production. The act of market exchange announces but hides the social character of each worker’s labour.

When a buyer purchases a commodity all they are aware of is the price. However the price cannot tell the buyer about the social reality of the commodity; price information is only market information between consenting adults. Marx likens the price of the commodity to a “*social hieroglyph*” which can only be deciphered by a rigorous critique of political economy. Only then can the commodity be revealed as a peculiar social relationship between capital and labour around the private ownership of the means of production while masquerading on the market as a “*thing*”.

Socialism will be altogether different set of social relationships. Within Socialism production and production relations will be transparent. Information between producers and the rest of society will be direct and open through rational democratic planning rather than being distorted through the market and the price mechanism. Socialism will be co-operative social labour producing useful things directly to meet human need. Until Socialism is established the commodity will remain a fetish, a “*thing*” representing class exploitation within the productive process.

As Marx acknowledged:

“*The veil is not removed from the countenance of the social life-processes, i.e. the process of material production, until it becomes production by freely associated men, and stands under their conscious and planned control*” (CAPITAL VOL. 1 ch. 1 The Commodity p. 173 Penguin edition 1996).

Capital Fetishism and the Productive Process

How are the social origins in the production of the commodity lost in the process of exchange? The mystification begins in the labour market where labour power is bought and sold and then in the production of the commodity itself. The very act of exchange abstracts concrete labour so that the value of commodities can be compared through the medium of money. The peculiarity of capitalism is that capital as a social relationship is hidden by many different masks capital wears in the various circuits of capital; money capital; constant capital and variable capital.

Constant capital refers to the money capital spent buying raw materials, equipment, buildings, machinery and so on. Marx referred raw material and machinery as constant capital because their value does not increase in the process of commodity production. The amount of constant capital expresses the mass of “*dead labour*” at the disposal of the capitalist class. Dead labour is the past exploitation of the working class. A machine or a lorry does not announce itself as dead labour. Constant capital appears in the market as a material thing with a price.

Variable capital refers to the amount of money capital spent by capitalists on buying the commodity, labour power.

Marx called this part of capital “*variable capital*” because it increased value in the process of production. Variable capital generates a “*surplus value*” the source of the unearned income of rent, interest and profit.

Constant and variable capital pin point two aspects of the hidden social relationship in the capitalist productive process; dead or used up labour on the one hand and living labour producing a surplus labour time or value on the other. In the productive process the capitalist as personification of capital is sovereign both as consumer of labour power and more importantly as owner of the means of production.

An account of Commodity fetishism throws light on the unity and conflict between productive forces and productive relations. As Marx put it:

“The means of production are at once changed into means for the absorption of the labour of others. It is no longer the worker who employs the means of production, but the means of production that employs the worker. Instead of being consumed by him as material elements of his productive activity, they consume him as a ferment necessary to their own life-processes, and the life-process of capital consists solely in its own motion as self-valorizing value (CAPITAL VOLUME I chapter 11 The Rate and Mass of Surplus Value p. 425).

Capital is not a thing; although constant and variable capital lost in the productive process are perceived as “*things*” for sale on the market. Capital is instead a definite social relationship belonging to a definite historical social system of society whose obsession is not the “*consumer*” but capital accumulation and profit.

Later in CAPITAL, Marx dealt with interest bearing capital and fictional capital which display: “*the conception of capital fetish in its consummate form*” (CAPITAL VOLUME III, Chapter 24 *Interest Bearing Capital as the superficial form of the capital relation* p. 523 Penguin edition). Capital, invested in stocks, loans, annuities and bonds underwritten by the State: “*... appears as a mysterious and self creating source of interest, of its own increase*” (ibid p. 516).

Now it is derivatives, swaps, equity futures and other financial instruments. In the City it does appear that money breeds money and capital no longer bears the marks of its origin in the productive process. As Marx noted, quoting Goethe: “*The money’s body is now by love possessed. As soon as it is lent..., interest accrues to it no matter whether it is asleep or awake, at home or abroad, by day or by night...*”(ibid p.517-518).

Interest-bearing capital is the misrepresentation of the relations of production and it is godsend to the economists who want to present capital as the source of wealth; to present capitalists as the “*wealth creators*” and to deny the origin of social wealth through the exploitation of wage labour in the productive process.

Here is the alchemical formula which Marx referred to as **M-M1**, of money as “*potentially self expanding value*”. Money appears to breed money; the production of something from nothing; gold out of paper or credit; the illusion of “*wealth creation*” from the “*masters of the universe*” like Mr Montezemolo who do not produce wealth but merely redistribute it. And in the City we have the ultimate fetish; young men and women with first class Oxbridge degrees in economics and mathematics who gaze into their Apple iPads lost to reality as they rapidly move profit around from one investors pocket to another in the frenzied anarchy that is one of the financial casinos of the world.

Leaving the economist’s fictional world behind us.

What of the producers of the Apple iPads locked away in sweat shop factories in China? For the economists they are merely a “*factor of production*” to be completely ignored as their fictional “*consumer*” pursues his or hers infinite desires checked only by scarce resources.

The Shenzhen Foxconn factory in Guangdong province, China, houses 400,000 workers producing the iPads for Apple. In fact 70 percent of Apple’s products are manufactured at the Shenzhen plant (CHINA SOURCING NEWS 31.05.10).

Foxconn pays a basic monthly wage of 950 yuan (\$US140) in line with Shenzhen’s official minimum wage.

Employees must work hours of overtime each day to make about 2,000 yuan to meet basic needs. Foxconn recruits undergo a disciplined military style training to instill in them obedience to the company's rules.

Workers live in dormitories with up to 10 people a room. A single dormitory houses 5,000 workers, and there are many dozens of them. Workers are only allowed to enter their own rooms with electronic badges and are not allowed to cook, or have visitors or sexual relations. The dormitories have no air conditioning, unlike the cool conditions of the factory floor, a deliberate ruse to induce workers to do extra overtime during the summer months.

On production lines there are restrictions on how often workers may go to the toilet. They are under multiple security surveillance and rarely have the opportunity to communicate with each other. Recent suicide by workers at the factory saw Foxconn force employees to sign an "anti-suicide" agreement linked to compensation claims made by workers' families.

Of course attention has been focused in the media only on the low pay and poor working conditions of the workers at Shenzhen. Yet the way in which they are exploited would be exactly the same if they had been paid high wages and worked and lived in very good conditions. These workers would still be exploited; still be creating surplus value. To penetrate no further than the misery of being employed by Foxconn still leaves capitalism unexplained.

Ethics cannot penetrate the reality of capitalism only the application of a labour theory of value to the commodity. The so-called "*socialist ethics*" of writers like the late philosopher G. A. Cohen (see WHY NOT SOCIALISM?) who uses concepts of "*justice*" to criticise capitalism and advocate a utopian Socialism, is merely the cry of a secular religion traced back to the 1920's Oxbridge/Hampstead Intellectuals like G. D. H. Cole and R. H. H. Tawney –two examples of those sandal-wearing, vegetarian beardies so despised by George Orwell- who would criticise capitalism on ethical grounds, but deliberately misrepresent Marx's ideas and tell their supporters to vote Labour.

Avoiding a tanning

In the first volume of CAPITAL, Marx presents a powerful image both of the capitalist as a buyer and consumer of labour power and the worker as seller of labour power.

Marx wrote that when we leave the world of the economist "*with his views, his concepts and the standard by which he judges society*"; a change takes place in the appearance of the actors, "*our dramatis personae*".

And Marx explained what this change was:

"...he who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning" (CAPITAL VOL. 1 *The transformation of Money into Capital* chapter 6 p. 280 Penguin 1996).

Marx does not mean that the capitalist is going to physically beat the worker but that the worker is about to undergo the same process as rawhide being transferred into leather; a change from concrete labour to abstract value creating labour.

The consumer has been unmasked. The capital-labour relationship is revealed for what it is; class power and privilege on the one hand and class subservience and exploitation on the other. For the working class to avoid a "*tanning*" from their employers requires workers to begin to take conscious and political action necessary for a Socialist majority to replace capitalism with Socialism. A start would be for workers to understand the exploitive social system in which they live.

And there is no better guide than the writings of Marx. Yes, the texts might be difficult but they give the reader an understanding of the world of commodities and the reality of class exploitation that lay behind them

[Back to top](#)

Is Barak Obama a Marxist?

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Is Barak Obama a Marxist? Of course not. The last thing on President Obama's agenda is revolutionary Socialist change despite wild and rabid Republicans calling him a "*Marxist*" and his regime *Communist* or *Socialist*.

During the presidential election Obama repeatedly identified himself as a supporter of capitalism. He remarked of capitalism- "*Look, I am a pro-growth, free-market guy. I love the market.*" (Quoted in Naomi Klein, "*Obama's Chicago Boys*," THE NATION June 12, 2008).

Obama's Inaugural Address proclaimed that "*the question*" of "*whether the market is a force for good or ill*" was not up for debate. "*Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom*," he proclaimed, "*is unmatched.*" (Barack Obama, "INAUGURAL ADDRESS," January 20, 2009, read transcript online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html>

Let us look at whether the market is "*a force for good or ill*".

Yes, the labour market, the buying and selling of labour power and the exploitation of the worker's capacity to work by the capitalist in the productive process, does generate enormous amount of social wealth. But it does not expand freedom. What it does allow is for the capitalist class to remain in a life of privilege and unimaginable wealth.

Not so the working class. As the recent programme "Unreported World" (CHANNEL 4 25.06.10 which can be seen on channel4.com/unreportedworld) showed 1 in 5 workers in the US are unemployed, 3 million are homeless and 40 million children do not have enough to eat.. Capitalism has not expanded their wealth or freedom.

In fact capitalism constantly fails the working class. In 2009, according to "*Unreported World*" many city areas in the US have seen the largest increase in demand for food assistance since 1991. The reporter also stated that three million people have been made homeless.

Poverty and Homelessness in the US

Capitalism's failure to meet the need of all society has also been highlighted by the US Conference of Mayors in their HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS REPORT (mayorsreport.org/pressreleases2009). The report is a snapshot of hunger and homelessness in one of the richest capitalist countries in the world.

The report noted that the US Department of agriculture reported that in 2008 14.6 per cent of American households were "food insecure" (page 4).

The Report represented 27 US cities between October 2008 and September 2009 during the transition between the Bush and Obama presidential administrations. The figures show the human misery arising from the economic crisis and the growth of mass unemployment, house foreclosures and evictions.

Twenty-two cities reported an increase in the number of people requesting assistance for the first time. According to the mayors' report unemployment was the main cause of hunger in their cities, followed by high housing costs and low wages (page 4). The Federal programme account for about 24 percent of food to feed the unemployed the rest comes from charity. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) received some additional funds through the Government but its budget is only \$400 million compared to the billions which went into the defence budget for the war in Afghanistan and in bailing out the banks and large car manufacturing corporations.

Nineteen cities cited in the mayors' report said food stores and emergency kitchens had to make cutbacks this year. These included reducing the amount of food served per visit, turning away people due to a lack of resources and new

restrictions on the number of times each household could visit food stores. Most cities anticipate having a difficult time meeting the high demand for food assistance in the future because of continuing high unemployment, the high cost of living and the impact on Federal and State budget cuts.

“Freemarketvilles”.

CHANNEL 4’s *Unreported World* interviewed many casualties of capitalism’s market failure. Half of the people were living in tents through having had their homes repossessed; many lived rough at night on city streets, the worse area known as “*skid row*”. Whole districts in US cities have had houses boarded up and banks own empty houses because there is no market for them. Some nineteen cities reported an increase in family homelessness. There have been 800,000 foreclosures in 2009 with some economists predicting over a million by 2010 rising to 2.5 million by 2012.

Empty homes banks cannot sell exist side by side with a vast unmet need for shelter. However, Capitalism does not exist to meet human need. Instead seventeen cities report that emergency shelters consistently have “*clients*” *sleeping in overflow cots, in chairs, in hallways and other similar sleeping arrangements*. More than half the cities reported that shelters had to turn away homeless people because of a lack of available beds.

This, in a country where building materials are stored-up in warehouses because there is no market for them and where building workers remain unemployed because there is no profitable employment for them. Such is the irrationality and contradiction of an anti social system of commodity production and exchange for profit.

Some parts of the US the problem of homelessness is worse than others. In Portland all emergency shelters are operating at maximum capacity, and many maintain waiting lists of 8 to 10 weeks. In Sacramento, one shelter reports a waiting list of close to 300 persons from displaced families

The mayors’ report notes that new tent cities and other large homeless encampments have sprung up over 2009 in Detroit, Los Angeles, Nashville, Charleston and Providence, Rhode Island, while existing camps have increased in size in Des Moines, Phoenix, Sacramento and Seattle.

As the US’s economic and housing crisis worsens people are setting up temporary encampments or shanty towns that are popularly known as tent cities. Seattle’s newest tent city is called Nickelsville. The encampment is made up of over 100 tents and is named after Mayor Greg Nickels’s reactionary comments toward the homeless; the John Redwood of American politics.

This development is similar to the Hooverville Tent Cities of the 1930’s depression. In both the number and types of inhabitants, the new tent cities do not equate to the homelessness of the 1930s. But the symbolism of capitalism’s failure to meet the needs of all society is powerful. And so the political blame game begins.

Already some of the cities have been named by Republicans “*obamavilles*” just as Democrats named the first tent cities appearing in 2008 as *Bushvilles*. Blaming politicians and bankers is easy but wrong. The cause of the problem is capitalism.

A better name for these tent cities is “*freemarketvilles*”; the market freedom under capitalism for the tens of thousands of workers and their families to be periodically made homeless, hungry and unemployed.

Capitalism has the potential to feed, clothe and house the world’s population let alone those in the US. But the profit motive restricts production. What kind of social system reduces hundreds of thousands men women and children to live in tents, to beg for food and housing assistance cheek by jowl with unimaginable wealth and privilege?

One which should have been long ago replaced by Socialism.

[Back to top](#)

Marx & the Abolition of the Wages System

At any time in the history of capitalism there have been lots of people and organisations occupied in trying to solve wages problems, the difference between now and the past being that the problems multiply and become more complex and the armies of “*solvers*”, politicians, business people, academics, trade union officials and so on become larger and larger.

There is not the slightest prospect that these people will solve the problems associated with what Marx called “*the wages system*”.

In the present economic depression, with unemployment over 2.5million, many workers have had to take wage cuts. In 2008, workers at the Ford plant in Luton were put on part-time work with some being told to take a 2 to 9 month sabbatical with a 70% drop in wages. When interviewed one worker complained it was not “*fair*” (DAILY MAIL 17. 12. 08).

Over a century and a half ago Karl Marx urged the trade unions to give up struggling for “*fair*” wages and go for the abolition of the wages system, not, of course, as a tactic that could be operated in a capitalist social system but as an integral part of the abolition of capitalism and its replacement by Socialism.

Marx was being logical.

The Socialism Marx envisaged involved “*abolition of buying and selling, of the bourgeois conditions of production*” (COMMUNIST MANIFESTO) and it would not be possible to abolish buying and selling generally and yet retain it in the form of the employer buying the worker’s labour-power and paying him wages for it.

In the late nineteenth century the idea of abolishing the wages system appeared to have become widely accepted in organizations making some claim to be socialist. In 1890 the Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society both signed “THE MANIFESTO OF ENGLISH SOCIALISTS” which contained the pledge: “*We look forward to an end forever to the wages system*”.

Among the individuals who signed on behalf of their organizations were Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb, but before long most of the signatories forgot all about it and were busy joining the anti-socialist Labour Party which devoted itself to the attempt to solve social problems, including wages, within capitalism. That attempt has of course been fruitless.

Marx foresaw that it would fail and explained why this was bound to happen. In one of his early writings he said:

“*What errors are committed by the advocates of piecemeal reform, who either want to raise wages and thereby improve the conditions of the working class, or... like Proudhon... regard equality of wages as the aim of social revolution*” (from Economic and philosophical Manuscripts Quoted in McLellan’s MARX BEFORE MARXISM, Pelican, p. 214).

And he pinpointed the basic error of their approach to the problem in their belief that it is possible to retain the capitalist mode of production and superimpose on it a socialist principle of distribution.

One place in which he explained this was in his notes on the 1875 constitution of the German Social Democratic Party, published as CRITIQUE OF THE GOTHA PROGRAMME.

Marx said:

“*Vulgar socialism has accepted as gospel from the bourgeois economists (and a part even from the democracy have taken over the doctrine from the unreflecting socialists) that the problems of distribution can be considered and treated independently of the mode of production from which it is inferred that Socialism turns mainly upon the*

question of distribution”

Written long before the British Labour Party was formed, this might be the description of the muddled thinking that has always governed the actions of Labour governments.

This includes the raft of social policies enacted by the last Labour Government under, first Tony Blair and then, later by Gordon Brown in an attempt to eradicate poverty within capitalism.

The full scale of Labour's failure to end poverty was revealed before the last election in 2009 when the Government admitted that hundreds of thousands of people were being plunged into deprivation even before the world economic crisis and trade depression had taken place. Ministers admitted that they had been unable to make any impression on the numbers of children and pensioners in poverty.

In fact, by 2009, 300,000 more pensioners had fallen into the government's own definition of poverty. And child poverty increased in numbers to 1.5 million (THE INDEPENDENT 8.07.09 and 29.01.10). Ministers were forced to admit that they had all but abandoned Labour's promise to halve child poverty by 2020. The economic crisis was now the priority for the government. Capitalism and the problems of capitalism have to be the first on the agenda for all governments.

The failure of the Labour Government to solve the question of poverty was highlighted again in a report AN ANATOMY OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN THE UK, published by the National Equality Panel in January 2010. The report had been commissioned by Harriet Harman, then Minister for Equality.

The very first sentence of the report said: *“Britain is an unequal country, more so than many other industrialized countries and more so than it was a generation ago.”* The report went on to show that the top ten percent had increased their wealth throughout the Labour administration while for the poorest in the country the amount they received by the time they retired had fallen.

The Labour government spent billions of pounds on social reforms; tax credits, the introduction of the minimum wage, Sure Start, school programmes, Welfare to Work, increased NHS spending and so on.

All these reforms failed to eradicate poverty because it is caused and sustained by the private ownership of the means of production. It is through political control alone that the capitalists can maintain their private ownership, wealth and privilege.

The lesson of the report was that despite the good intentions of Labour Ministers you cannot end poverty by redistributing social wealth on the basis of the profit system. Capitalism only works for the rich.

It is not possible for the Labour Party or any other political party to administer capitalism in such a way that it can eradicate the social problems facing the working class. The failure of the last Labour Government was not an accident. It was not due to mistakes or strategy. Nor was it the failure of individuals.

The Labour Party failed because you cannot run capitalism in any other way than for those who own the means of production. That is, by running the profit system in the interests of the rich.

We leave the last words to Tony Blair who is now fast joining the richest ten per cent of the population in Britain by amassing £20 million since resigning as Labour Prime Minister – his bounty for supporting the oil war in Iraq.

Blair said in 1996 a year before he became Prime Minister:

“If the next Labour government has not raised the living standards of the poorest by the end of its time in office, it will have failed” (EVENING STANDARD 10.01.10).

Quite.

Obstacles to Socialist Understanding

On the face of it, the wage worker has a free will and can make a free choice. If he decides in the mass that the capitalist system should continue, there is nothing that can be done about it besides explaining the real situation and trying to change his mind. Talking and writing about Socialism and the science of society, that is, the study of society past, present and future, is what we do

Superficially it appears to be a simple matter of deciding which body of ideas would deal effectively with social problems. Looking closer at the worker's "*free will*", we find that it is anything but free. It is as "free" as the so-called social contract between capital and labour where not only is there no freedom of choice, apart from the choice of employers, but a compelling economic need for the workers to exchange his labour-power for wages. In the same way, his "*free-will*" is circumscribed by the intellectual atmosphere of capitalist society. The old Jesuits boasted that given the responsibility for educating a child up to the age of 7 he was theirs for life. After hundred years of Labour and left-wing propaganda, the ruling class would have justification for feeling the same.

Marx, using the materialist conception of history, pointed out that the dominant ideas prevailing in any society based on property were the ideas of the ruling class. Most workers consider that the interests are bound up with those of their employers. If the employer goes to the wall, their job goes with him. His problems are made their problems. The traditions of capitalist society and its ideas are based on private property and the entire capitalist organisation of production and distribution. The worker is bred and born and reared in this tradition. Marx was correct when he stated that tradition was the dead hand of the past weighing like an Alp on the mind of the living.

The problem we have to face is how to get the workers to look beyond the generally accepted view of society and to understand that they hold the key to their own emancipation. This is an enormous task but not an impossible one. There are no half-way stages to socialism or degrees to socialism. We can not arrive at Socialism by a series of political measures carried out over a long period. Capitalism must be abolished as a whole with its wages system and class antagonisms. It is not possible to have part of the economy running on Socialist lines. History has exposed the futility of organisations who argue that Socialism could be introduced gradually. Their activities have produced confusion, not Socialism. This is detrimental to the socialist case, and is a major factor in the present low level of political understanding. Whilst tradition is a dormant factor, ideology, which includes the spread of reformist ideas, is a very virulent one.

Very few workers are able to discuss their social role. They will repeat what they read in newspapers, or hear on the radio and TV. But this only serves to confuse. There is no widespread discussion or dissemination of information about the science of society and social evolution which would show the temporary nature of capitalist society. State capitalism is always presented and described as Socialism; partly through intention, but mainly through ignorance. History is presented as great men doing great deeds. We are often told that we live in an enlightened age because the capitalist mass media have brought knowledge to the worker's fireside. The workers are certainly bombarded with information about the world outside.

However, masses of information do not in themselves educate people or produce a questioning of their social position. It absorbs their interest and provides recreation, but generally speaking it exhausts the mind because of its sheer volume. Thinking objectively is practically impossible. This is all part of the capitalist propaganda which is based on the art of preoccupation or getting workers to think subjectively.

The intellectual capabilities of the worker are numbed in the capitalist process. He has, as Marx put it, become an appendage to a machine. He produces bits and pieces and his creative ability is stifled because he is a cog in the wheel. In these circumstances, it is a struggle for mind to be developed and nourished. The repetitive industrial processes - pushing buttons and pulling levers, feeding machines, attending conveyor belts - tends to a life as mechanical as the machine he attends.

Working without any set purpose with an empty life in front of him, he is under a colossal handicap. Considering the sheer drudgery and emptiness of life under the conditions of capital, the wonder is that workers are still reasonable. But when man is faced with a situation where social conditions are intolerable, he will react and deal with those conditions. The obvious and most immediate thing workers will turn to is social reform, and if their interests can be served by social reform capitalism will continue. But the point is, can capitalism meet the demands of social reform? The evidence to date proves that it cannot.

The Labour Party and others, including the many left wing elements, have forgotten the intelligence of the worker. The whole concept of leadership is based on the assumption of mass ignorance. They feed the workers on reform pap – it is easy to swallow. This very superficial diet lacks any progressive element; it leads nowhere and can lead nowhere. The application of any reform programme depends for its frame of reference on the continued existence of the conditions of capitalism. Reform is a social roundabout which moves around a fixed position but it can never break away from it. Continual saturation of reform propaganda has had its effect on workers' minds. At the same time there is a constant criticism because of its failure to achieve any lasting results.

The substance of the socialist case is that the workers remove the capitalists from their ownership and control of all the means of production and distribution, by using the political machinery, and establish a system of society based on common ownership under the democratic control of the whole community. Production will be for use and the productive forces now under the restrictions of capital will be unfettered to meet the new social requirements at every level. These are the simple propositions. Their implications are epoch making but that is what revolution is all about.

The final test of socialist ideas must be: are they relevant and will they work in practice? If they are correct then we must carry on. But can the workers understand and will they accept the Socialist case? The two things go together. Class consciousness means the recognition of the existence of class society, and arising from this the knowledge that political action by the majority based on a clear understanding of Socialism will replace capitalism by a Socialist society.

The failure over the years of workers to respond to Socialist propaganda has led some people to claim that the whole concept is utopian and impracticable, and that the average worker is unable to understand it. The argument fails to take into account the oppressive effect of capitalist ideology, but also that our greatest ally is the economic conditions themselves.

So far, no evidence has been presented that our case is unsound. The idea that Socialism is utopian and unworkable arises out of the present distorted capitalist conditions which most workers accept as natural. Today it is natural for the worker to live in a constant state of insecurity; it is natural for millions of them to be underfed and badly housed; it is natural for them to sell their labour-power for wages.

Man's history from the earliest period has been a constant battle to produce wealth and develop his means of production. This he has done. What could be more natural than that the present generation should enjoy the products?

The tasks which face the Socialist Party of Great Britain are to keep the Socialist position clear so that it can be readily understood. Confusion must be avoided at all costs. We must never fall prey to the temptation to lose patience and abandon the struggle. Unless the whole of historical precedent is to be set aside, people will solve their social problems when they become conscious of the solution.

This article has been written up with some slight alterations from the papers of the late J. D'Arcy and it was first published in the SOCIALIST STANDARD January 1977. Comrade D'Arcy was expelled with other comrades in May 1991 for continuing to take political action as the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

[Back to top](#)

Who Will Do the Unpleasant Work In Socialism?

A question which is often put to Socialists is: “*who will do the dirty and dangerous work in Socialism?*” If work in Socialism is to be voluntary who will deliberately volunteer to clean out the sewers or work on an oil rig or crane steel beams hundreds of metres up from the ground?

Opponents think it is a knock down answer to Socialism; part of the human nature argument which views human beings as violent, selfish sinners incapable of human co-operation, altruism and compassion.

No scientific evidence exists to show that human beings are so selfish that Socialism is impossible any more than human beings are so violent that co-operation on a world scale is unlikely. Even capitalism requires co-operation within the productive process. And despite its wars, conflict and class struggle capitalism has to have a modicum of stability to produce commodities, make a profit and expand capital.

In fact, human beings have survived because they co-operate.

The human nature argument against Socialism is the last refuge of the politically stupid. Politically stupid because those who use the argument that human behaviour is innately selfish, brutal and violent never apply it to themselves.

The problem of employment clouds the view of work as something unpleasant. Work under capitalism usually takes the form of employment where one person, a capitalist, employs another, a worker, for a wage or salary and directs their work producing commodities for exchange and profit.

As a consequence, employment is often seen as degrading, unpleasant and something to avoid. As the saying goes: “*Only fools and horses work*”.

However there is work as leisure which workers take part in without complaint. There is gardening and there is the maintenance of steam trains run by enthusiasts where the stoker shovelling coal actually enjoys themselves. And parents have to change a baby’s nappy, a thankless and unpleasant task but it has to be done. The RNLI volunteers also do a dangerous job risking their lives to save those in trouble at sea.

So doing dirty and dangerous work needs to be put in a social context. Where people understand that certain work is socially important they will do it. Wage labour does not give this insight because the worker is lost within the wages system of class exploitation and having to work for someone else.

What of unpleasant work in Socialism? We can turn to the experience of manual work by Oscar Wilde. The capitalist State vindictively forced Wilde to break rocks when imprisoned in 1896 at Reading Gaol. When writing about manual labour some five years earlier, in 1891, Wilde questioned manual labour that gave no pleasure:

“There is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labour at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading. It is mentally and morally injurious to man to do anything in which he does not find pleasure, and many forms of labour are quite pleasureless activities, and should be regarded as such.

He went on to say:

“To sweep a slushy crossing for eight hours on a day when the east wind is blowing is a disgusting occupation. To sweep it with mental, moral or physical dignity seems to me impossible. To sweep it with joy would be appalling. Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. All work of that kind should be done by machine”.... At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man”. THE SOUL OF MAN UNDER SOCIALISM (1891) Journey man 1999 P. 26 -27

Wilde believed that society could be organised so that people could enjoy “*delightful leisure*” and it was in this context that he said that if this is written off as “*utopian*” then:

“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing”.

However there will be a realisation in Socialist society, as there is among Socialists now, that people in order to survive have to eat, drink, sleep and maintain their health and procreate. To survive requires co-operative social work. And under certain social conditions the way in which work takes place also has a marked effect on those who carry it out.

In Socialism, based on co-operation, mutual aid and common ownership, when volunteers are asked to clean the street, to go down sewers and to crane steel girders there will be no lack of volunteers because the work will be seen to be transparently necessary for the meeting of human need. And of course, machinery would be adopted in Socialism wherever possible to minimise unpleasant and dangerous work. The aim of Socialism would be to make work a creative human experience, a meeting of a basic human need.

There is nothing innate about human behaviour which prevents workers either becoming Socialists or establishing and maintaining Socialism. So the answer to those who ask who will do the unpleasant work in Socialism is *“We will”*. And a Socialist society would continue to use machinery to reduce unpleasant and dirty work to a minimum.

[Back to top](#)

The Right to Strike

Increasingly employers are using the courts to prevent workers from taking strike action. The first use of the courts was by British Airways in May 2010 of this year in its dispute with the trade union Unite. BA won its court action on technicalities involving the union's strike ballot procedure. A month later British Telecom also won a similar court injunction on technical grounds against workers from the Communications Workers Union taking strike action.

Unite won its appeal against the injunction preventing members of British Airways cabin crew from going on strike. However, it was concerned that BA won the injunction in the first place, after the High Court initially ruled that the union had not correctly followed rules about contacting its members with strike result details.

Unite said the decision was made because it had not told its members that 11 ballot papers had been spoilt in its latest vote on industrial action in February. Unite joint leader Derek Simpson said

"It strikes at the heart of the democratic right to strike in a properly conducted ballot by bringing technical difficulties," (BBC NEWS 20.05.10).

Although the Thatcher administration enacted numerous anti-trades union laws during the 1980's, employers and workers had not, in the main, used the courts in industrial disputes. This has not meant that strikes have always been legal. They have not. Both official and unofficial illegal strikes have taken place over the past two hundred years even though it has meant for workers hardship, fines and imprisonment. In short, the class struggle cannot be legislated away.

During the Second World War the national government passed the war-time Order 1305 which was not withdrawn until August 1951. This order outlawed both strikes and lock-outs. However, during the war, there were numerous strikes notably at Rolls Royce, Hillingdon in 1940 and the country-wide miner's industrial action of 1944. And from 1946 there were many illegal strikes during the post-war Labour administration.

This still did not stop Hartley Shawcross, the Labour Attorney General, to unsuccessfully try to convict the leaders of the Dock Strike in February 1951. All it served to do was to remind the working class whose side the Labour Government was on in the class struggle.

Under capitalism workers do not own the means of production. They are forced to enter the labour market and sell their ability to work for a living. As in any market transaction, workers, as sellers, try to sell their labour-power at the highest price possible and under the most favourable working conditions.

Out of the experience of having to deal with employers, workers formed trade unions to protect individuals from victimisation and to press collectively for higher pay and better working conditions. Trade unions were at first illegal but carried on the class struggle regardless of State coercion against them.

Bargaining over wages and salaries is part and parcel of life under capitalism and will continue while capitalism and the wages system last. And the main weapon the trade unions have in the class struggle over wages is the strike. To have strike action withdrawn or compromised by the courts would hamper the day-to-day class struggle of workers, although, as it has already been pointed out, workers have taken strike action in the past whether legal or not. Although the BA strike continues Unite were successful in getting the strike off the ground –although they face a hard struggle against an intransigent employee- there is no reason to suppose the Communication Workers Union will overcome their legal difficulties.

The real lesson for workers is that strike action is usually successful under good trade conditions when employers do not want production disrupted and when there are profits to be made. The Socialist Party of Great Britain has pointed out to trade unions that the best strikes are ones that do not occur, for the threat of a strike is enough for employers to concede pay demands. This is not the case in a trade depression where production is being curtailed and workers are being laid off. Workers are then at a disadvantage. The really important question workers should be asking themselves is not whether there is a right to strike but why must they go on and on struggling for higher wages within an exploitive wages system weighted against them given that the employers own the means of production from which they and they alone profit from. This question was asked and answered by Karl Marx. He said this:

...the working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady. They ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerilla fights incessantly springing up from the never ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economical reconstruction of society. Instead of the conservative motto: "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: "Abolition of the wages system!" (VALUE PRICE AND PROFIT 1865 marxist.org)

[Back to top](#)

The Wages System versus Human Need

A salary of £14,400 is the minimum a single person needs for an acceptable standard of living, according to research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). That includes not only basics like food and housing, but also the essentials needed to "*participate fully in society*", the charity said (BBC NEWS 10.07.10).

The essentials included spending on mobile phones, internet access and socialising. Car use was excluded in favour of public transport. It puts earners above the official government poverty threshold and is also significantly higher than the amount you would expect to earn on the minimum wage (£5.80 an hour).

Of course many workers earn less than £14,400. Joseph Rowntree Foundation is obviously angling for the minimum wage threshold to be increased. As social reformers JRF believe in fair and equitable wages. A reading of their report indicates quite clearly that they have no idea of what constitutes the wage and why there is wage inequality in capitalism.

So what constitutes the wage? Workers are forced into the labour market because they do not own the means of

production. The wages system and wage slavery is the mark of poverty not the level of the wage itself.

The value of labour power –the mental and physical ability to work sold to a capitalist by a worker is determined like any other commodity. And this is by the socially necessary labour time required to produce it. The value of labour power depends upon the amount of labour necessary to produce the basic necessities of life –to feed, clothe, house the worker including the next generation of workers as well.

Under capitalism the labour time necessary to replace the value of labour power is less than the labour the worker actually performs for the capitalist in the productive process. And different labour time contains different values and therefore different wage rates. There can be no equality of wages as the failure of the 1963 Equal Pay Act demonstrates. And although some wages are above the mean and some below they cannot be too low to leave the worker “*in a crippled state*” and unfit for the labour market.

Workers and organisations like The Joseph Rowntree Foundation cannot see this just as they are ignorant of class exploitation. Workers are paid at the end of the week according to the hours they have worked. Workers though, spend part of their time at work producing for themselves, what Marx called necessary working time. And another part of the worker’s time at work takes place to produce commodities for their employer, what Marx called surplus labour time.

Surplus labour time creates surplus value and is the source of the capitalist’s unearned income of rent, interest and profit.

So a wage and the level of the wage are linked to class exploitation and poverty. The worker might have needs but the wage reflects only those needs necessary for capitalism to keep him fit for exploitation. Needs such as creative and fulfilling work; decent housing and so on are not met by the wage and can never be met while the worker is locked into the wages system.

And it was Marx who gave a very good reason to reject the social reformers plea for of fair or equitable pay. He wrote:

“The cry for an equality of wages rests, therefore, upon a mistake, is an insane wish never to be fulfilled...Upon the basis of the wages system the value of labouring power is settled like that of any other commodity; and as different kinds of Labouring power have different values, or require different quantities of labour for their production, they must fetch different prices in the labour market. To clamour for equal or even equitable retribution on the basis of the wages system is the same as to clamour for freedom on the basis of the slavery system (WAGE, PRICES AND PROFIT, Selected works Vol. I, p. 426).

And this brings us onto JRF’s remark about participating fully in society. Full participation in society is impossible under capitalism. The private ownership of the means of production prevents full participation. Capitalism excludes the majority from full participation to shape production and distribution to meet social need while the State exists merely serves the interests of the capitalist class.

Full participation in society only begins with the establishment of common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, founded ironically in 1904, totally ignores the reality of capitalism in “*the insane wish*” for fair and equitable distribution of wages which Marx has shown to be impossible under the wages system. For over a hundred years the JRF has sought to reform capitalism for the benefit of all society. It has been a complete a waste of time.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s pursuit of equitable wages is simply the conservative doctrine of the social reformer. You cannot have an equitable distribution based on the profit system. JRF want the impossible; they want capitalism without the effects of capitalism. Capitalism only exists to meet the interest and needs of the capitalist class and to keep them in a life of privilege and luxury. What is required by workers, whether they are on high or low wages, is to organise politically and consciously for the abolition of the wages system and the establishment of Socialism. Only in socialism can all people fully participate in the affairs of society.

Tomorrow's Surplus Value

You know where you are with economists like the late Milton Friedman. In books like FREE TO CHOOSE he defended capitalism and the interest of the capitalist to make a profit from exploiting workers.

When a capitalist invests their capital into a company they do not want it to go on supporting the high-spending and lavish life-style of the board of directors or to be used for philanthropic purposes. Capital is invested to make a profit. And this golden rule applies to banks as it does to industries.

In the post-economic liberal world of austerity many of the leading bankers are forced to wear sack-cloth and publicly self-flagellate in penance for their economic sins. One such penitent is the HSBC chairman Stephen Green.

Mr Green said that Milton Friedman was wrong to assert that companies should focus on shareholders above all other considerations. He made this claim in a lecture on “*Tomorrow’s Value*” at an event at Mansion House in London, organised by the sustainability think tank Tomorrow’s Company and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (DAILY TELEGRAPH 09.07.10).

Mr Green said:

Of course you need a profit but it is a by-product, a hallmark of success. It is not the be all and end all. It is not the raison d’etre of business. What is the purpose of business? Friedman says the social responsibility of business is to make a profit. But that will no longer do. Plain common sense will tell you that cannot do. Plain common sense will tell you that you have to have a sustainable business model. You have to inevitably go back to the considerable things that go beyond simply saying that it is the social responsibility of business to make a profit”.

Of course, Mr Green still stressed his continued support for free market economics but he went on to say that a business must engage with its “*stakeholders*” which not only includes its “*customers*” but “*employees and the communities in which they work*”. He also added, contra Milton Friedman:

Friedman said corporate philanthropy has no place. I think there is a very real place for corporate philanthropy.

Did that mean City bankers giving away their bonuses to the poor living adjacent to the Square mile? Of course not. Bankers are in the business of making money and use their unearned income to live a life of luxury and comfort to the exclusion of everyone else. But where profits come from was not touched upon by Mr Green although there was a half-clue in the title of his speech; “*Tomorrow’s Value*”.

To help Mr Green we can ask the question “*What does the capitalist do?*” Marx gave a very good answer. Marx said the capitalist was: “*the personification of capital*”. Marx stated that the capitalist:

“...does not produce in order to satisfy his needs with the product; he produces with absolutely no direct regard for consumption. He produces to in order to produce surplus value” (Section on Adam Smith, THEORIES OF SURPLUS VALUE, Part 1 Chapter III p.88 1976).

This is the core of what capitalism is about. Capitalist production does not take place for the benefit of workers or the wider community but rather for the self-expansion of capital; the production of surplus value and more surplus value.

Of course the workers are valuable to capitalists. As Marx noted:

“Without a class dependent on wages,...,there can be no production of surplus value; without the production of surplus value thee can be no capitalist production, and hence no capital or capitalist.(Results of the Immediate Process of Production appendix to CAPITAL VOLUME 1 Penguin ed. p1005 1996).

The aim and compelling motive of capitalism is the accumulation of capital. The production of surplus value which is exploited from the working class is the absolute law which imposes itself on every capitalist on pain of bankruptcy. And the capitalist just cannot sit back and just live a life of comfort and enjoyment. He has to re-invest his capital. And he also has to part with some of his profit to other capitalists; rent to landlords, dividends to shareholders, interest to the banks and tax to his State to protect and serve his interests.

All this was left out of Mr Green's lecture to his fellow bankers. Tomorrow's Surplus Value would have been a better heading for the lecture. Ending his address by adapting a notorious quotation of Sir Winston Churchill, Mr Green concluded:

"The market is the worst system of economic and social development-except for all the others that have been tried from time to time".

There was one social system Mr Green did not mention; common ownership and democratic control of the means of production and distribution by all of society. Socialism has not been tried yet. Socialism has none of the failures associated with the market; its waste, deliberate underproduction, anti-social pursuit of profit, anarchy, exploitation and human degradation. For all his humility, asceticism and penitence Mr Green could not offer his audience Socialism. Even for the new public relations exercise of extolling "*market morality*" now doing the rounds in the City it was too heavy a cross to bear.

[Back to top](#)

What Is the Socialist Party of Great Britain?

What is the Socialist Party of Great Britain?

The Socialist Party of Great Britain was founded in 1904 by a group of men and women, most of whom had been members of the Social Democratic Federation, whose leader was H M Hyndman. The SDF, it claimed, was dedicated, in the long run, to establishing Socialism.

In the meantime the SDF were prepared to go in for reforms which they thought would benefit the workers. The founders of the SPGB had carefully studied among much else, Karl Marx's CAPITAL. This is not a work about Socialism or Communism, but about the economics of capitalism.

Compared with other inquiries into capitalism, CAPITAL appeared to be sound and reliable. This view is still held by the members of the reconstituted Socialist Party of Great Britain who were expelled in May 1991 from the Socialist Party for taking political action in the full name of the Party although this ruse was only a pretext..

Armed with the knowledge of capitalism provided by Karl Marx as well as their own experience of the class struggle the founders of the SPGB recognised that reforms had done little to help the working class and they argued for a purely socialist policy and as a consequence they were expelled from the SDF.

The reasoning of the SPGB was that so long as capitalism lasts there will be social problems of crime, insecurity, poor housing, war, unemployment, recurrent trade depressions and varying degrees of poverty in a world of plenty; all still true to-day. The only solution to the problems caused by capitalism is the establishment of Socialism.

What is Socialism?

In 1904 "*Socialism*" had its original meaning, well understood in political circles. It did not mean, as it came to be perverted, "*nationalisation*" or, later, social security, the dole, the NHS and the so-called Welfare State. Socialism meant an entirely different social system rising from a completely different mode of production. This definition of

Socialism was inscribed at the head of the SPGB's OBJECT AND DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES – *a basis of common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interests of the whole community*. Only on this basis is a society possible where there will be free relations between people who are in control of what is produced and for whom.

The working class and the capitalist class

The working class is distinguished quite simply from the capitalist class by its economic status as wage slaves. To be a worker is not the question of income, of social behaviour, where one lives, or of one's tastes, but instead a social relationship with capitalists over the rate and intensity of exploitation.

The labour-capital relationship was historically formed under the necessity of workers having to sell their ability to work to those who own the means of production and distribution –the capitalists. And the object of the capitalist class is to exploit the working class and make a profit. Around this the class struggle is centred; and as Marx noted the class struggle is a political struggle.

Workers may be paid high or low but employed labour rests on class exploitation by the capitalist class. Employers buy labour-power like any other commodity for an agreed price and period of time. Capitalists buy labour power around the cost of its reproduction and receive more in social wealth produced by workers in the productive process than they pay out in wages and salaries.

Capitalists also have to employ workers who do not produce and distribute; civil servants, soldiers, policemen, office workers and so on. Their pay falls into line with those workers who do produce. It is the entire working class which is alone responsible for producing and maintaining the social wealth of society.

The capitalist system

Capitalism, then, is a society founded on conflict. Conflict between those who produce but do not own; a conflict to maintain a standard of life; a conflict between workers themselves for employment, conflicts between capitalists and other capitalists both nationally and internationally, in the latter case sometimes leading to war where workers end up killing and being killed for another class's interest.

In order to keep the goodwill and obedience of workers capitalists and their political agents use all kinds of inducement and indoctrination; ideas and beliefs such as patriotism, loyalty, religion; promises of better things to come; rewards for being good; all disseminated through family, schools, universities and the media.

None the less this does nothing to alter the fundamental class conflicts found in capitalism. These conflicts spring directly from the radical economic division of society where human interest is likely to be attended to only if it contributes to profit.

Is Socialism possible?

It has been shown time and again that people will work together in their own interest. Moreover, they will work happily and well at work which is congenial and apparently useful, above all, when it is socially praiseworthy. These are rare conditions under capitalism but since work is natural and should be pleasurable, this will be possible under Socialism where work will be seen as an important and basic human need.

It is often argued that people cannot work together, though all the evidence that exists leads to the opposite conclusion. For capitalism to be possible there has to be co-operation within social labour.

The hatreds in the world have sprung up, fermented and have been encouraged by the competitive struggle between capitalists over raw resources, trade routes and spheres of strategic influence.

Religious difference, for example, have for generations been used to rouse passions and enmity, playing on the ignorance and misery of the uneducated and give the impression that they are quarrels of faith, nationhood, colour or some other superficial difference when they are in fact conflicts arising out of real material conditions within capitalism.

People who have lived together for years without going to war are suddenly roused by propaganda to fight one another; but these conflicts are merely conflicts of material interests between capitalists to which the working class have no interest.

There is no reason to suppose that such divisions could arise in a Socialist society where there are no artificial political boundaries and no classes and class conflict. Could such a society work without managers? One only has to look around the world to see that everything has been designed, produced, distributed and organised by the working class themselves. Management and managers, like accountants and time motion officers have social relevance only in capitalism. As Engels argued there will not be a “*socialist government*” but an administration of things. Socialism will be democratic with no leaders either in the affairs of society or in production.

How can Socialism be established?

If the social problems of capitalism are to be finally overcome, workers themselves must take control of the instruments of production and distribution – democratically – to be used by the people directly as a whole. If the Socialist case against capitalism is valid, no tinkering with the present profit system will ensure a lasting change in the condition of the great majority of the population; that is, the working class. Quite simply, capitalism cannot be made to run in the interest of all society.

Above all, workers are no freer today than they were in 1904, free either from their employment in paid work or from the incessant encroachment of their time at work by their employer. Workers are not free to decide about their own lives in a free and open way.

Political parties in Parliament, whatever banner they carry, are constrained by the capitalist system which runs under its own laws. In spite of often contradictory advice from their “*experts*”, politicians are helpless with the problems that face them. Since the SPGB was established there has been economic crisis after crisis with its high levels of unemployment, social alienation and unpredictability.

The revolutionary change which is necessary to establish Socialism must be the work of the working class itself. It does not require leaders to take control of the means of production and use it to directly meet human need.

Socialism requires workers, throughout the world, to actively understand the political need to establish Socialism. This means a Socialist majority, through their instructed delegates, securing Parliament by the revolutionary use of the vote, gaining control of the machinery of government and replacing capitalism with Socialism. Once the Socialist framework has been established society can then address and resolve the immediate social problems they face and plan production and distribution accordingly: production to meet social need.

THE AFGHAN WAR: “WAR ON TERROR” – OR FOR TREASURE?

Afghanistan is a country so poor it is hard to see why any government would think it worth fighting over, apart from its strategic situation. A meeting in London was held in June 2010 to promote Afghanistan as “*a money-making opportunity for investors*” (HE GUARDIAN, 15 June 2010). There are US and British geology reports of “*a potential \$1tn bonanza of untapped mineral wealth*”, huge deposits of copper, iron and lithium, plus rare precious stones.

As Chinese-controlled firms are involved, the US expresses concerns about probable environmental damage. Of Hajigak, the biggest iron deposit in Asia, possibly worth \$350 bn, Shahrani, an Afghan minister, said: “*To get the iron you have to cut a 3,500m mountain down to 2,500m. Of course you are going to have environmental problems*”

(ibid.). For the US and British governments to claim to be concerned about mere environmental issues is rich: the same processes are cutting down the Appalachian mountains, with strip mining for coal riding roughshod over local people's protests.

And what of the costs, environmental and human, of war?

[Back to top](#)

Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

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